

D.C. Firm Drops Lie Detector Use, Finds It Lacking in Solving Woes

By Edward S. Cohen

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A Washington drug store chain that began a lie detector test program last year for employees to cope with an inventory shrinkage problem, has given up the controversial polygraph as a wasted effort.

Milton Elsberg, president of Drug Fair Community Drug Co. Inc., which operates 81 stores in this area, has confirmed the existence of a Drug Fair lie detector program.

But he said that after nearly a year of seeking security through the device, he

had to conclude that "there are better, more permanent and lasting ways to induce reasonable loyalty and honesty from employees."

Quit Five Weeks Ago

Elsberg said the test program of the lie detector was run on an intermittent basis, and that he discovered that "There are other ways of getting to employees that are more personal and have a longer range effect." He said Drug Fair quit using the lie detector about five weeks ago.

Drug Fair's president said the original decision to try out the interrogatory ma-

chines came when officials found "trouble spots" in certain new stores.

Elsberg said that because of very rapid expansion in the last three years—with 40 to 50 stores opening—"We found it difficult to screen help with so many new employees." Generally, 30 or 40 employees man each drug store.

At one store, commented Elsberg, a day's receipts disappeared. Elsberg recalled that the employees were called together and asked if they would submit to the lie tests. All did submit, the money was found and returned, and a potentially messy police situation was quietly averted.

Second Try Fails

A second similar situation ended with inconclusive results. The lie detector did not unmask the culprit. Elsberg declined to state exactly what questions were asked.

It is known for instance, that a chain that does business here asks such questions as: Are you a pervert? Have you ever stolen?

A second grocery chain was chastised by the National Labor Relations Board several years ago for asking the question: Do you ever intend to form a union?

Elsberg said flatly that none of Drug Fair's questions took these forms. Rather, he asserted, "We made it clear from the start and every employee knows it, that we were not interested in private lives."

As alternatives, Elsberg suggested that a more sanguine effect can be had from careful study of job applications and references, a more comprehensive employee education effort, and incentives for employees, such as profitsharing. "All we want is a reasonable honesty," he said.